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The Role of Occupational Therapy: Military Dependents Transitioning into Motherhood

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Background

Transitioning into motherhood is challenging. Mothers are learning how to balance taking care of a newborn, household responsibilities, and self-care (Divecha, 2016). Established routines of daily life can be disrupted and it can also bring on new routines not previously practiced (Burningham et al., 2014). Adjustments of routine in everyday occupations can change quickly as the baby's needs evolve over time (Burningham et al., 2014). Military spouses are affected by the ever-changing culture that the military creates (Military One Source, 2019). Frequent moves can make it challenging to maintain the same routine and can have a negative influence on how it effects children (Strauss, 2016).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to further understand the roles, occupations, and routine challenges that new mothers face who are married to an active-duty service member and to create an educational program to help in this adjustment period of motherhood.

Method

Guided by Model of Human Occupation and Ecology of Human Performance. Mixed methods: Survey and interview using Likert and open- ended questions. Recruited 67 survey participants and 12 interview participants from social media platforms and through personal connections. Data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis method.
Research Question: What are the challenges new mothers face as they adjust in postpartum period for those married to an active-duty service member as it relates to their roles, rituals, routines, and habits.

Results

Theme	Quotes
Shift in Focus on Relationships	<i>“Your whole “normal” changes. It isn’t bad, it's just different. My challenge is definitely time. I never feel like I have enough of it. My other challenge is making sure that I am giving each child and my husband time.” -Survey 47</i>
Shift in Self-Identity	<i>“Loosing my identity as anything other than a mother.” –Survey 8</i> <i>“being a mom is the most important and my most favorite job. I love being a mom.” –Interview B</i>
Establishing Support Systems	<i>“We’re constantly moving as a military family. It's stressful at times but we also have the opportunity to meet new mothers and military mommy friends. They become your support system, outside of your spouse.” -Survey 48</i>
Routine Disruption	<i>“He was gone for seven days last spring right before quarantine hit and it was really hard for him coming back home because we had our schedule down. She was used to me being the lover and punisher, being both the good and bad cop. But then here comes daddy trying to be the parent and I have to tell him we don’t do this or we do it this way. It takes a while to reintegrate when he comes back home. I have to tell him that's not how we’ve been doing things or that didn’t work for us so now we have to teach daddy what we learned while he was gone that worked better for the baby to like have her routine down.” -Interview J</i>
Mental Health Challenges and Disappointments	<i>“When you go to a military clinic and you’ve had a baby you have to fill out this paper on how you’ve been feeling like are you sad, do you cry, do you find joy and I think that that's kind of bullshit. Because you know in all honesty for all three kids you know what the right answers are. There is even a star next to the answer that is the correct answer....I probably ended up having a little bit of postpartum depression or anxiety because I was alone.” -Interview I</i>

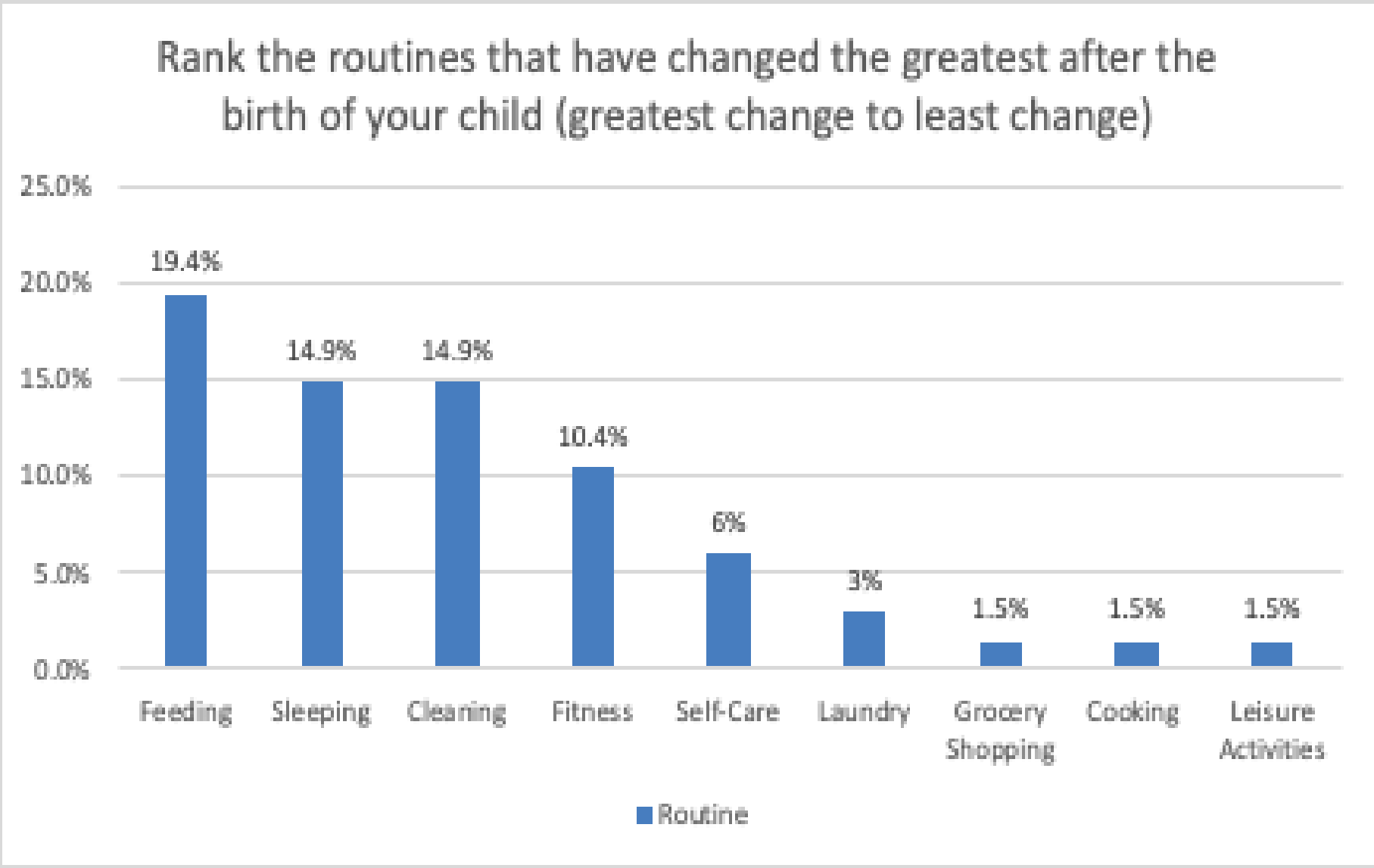
Conclusion

- "Eating Oreos while trying to brush your teeth is a perfect example of what it's like being a mom and being in the military."- Interview I**
- Limited OT research, programming, and resources available to military dependent mothers
 - Findings support an increased role of occupational therapists
 - Adjustment to motherhood can become increasingly challenging when combined with the influence of military lifestyle and culture
 - Occupations can be disrupted at any time due to a spouse’s work schedule, deployment, or recent PCS move.
 - Support systems are increasingly important

Implication for Occupational Therapy

- Program development
- Advocacy
- Occupational balance for military mothers in motherhood transition
- Expand the area of expertise of the OT profession

Figure 1 Occupations that have changed the greatest to least



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